



The Insider

www.senate.michigan.gov/switalski

Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10

December 21, 2009

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a location near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See the schedule below for details.

I also wanted to wish you a safe and happy holiday season, a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Mickey's Blog: Macomb Settles For Half

Compromise Cuts One Circuit Judge Instead of Two

It went down to the wire, but Macomb County got its top legislative priority on the last night of the 2009 session in Lansing.

After 6 months of wrangling in the State Senate, I was finally able to overcome Senate opposition and gain passage of a bill allowing Macomb and Oakland Counties to reduce the number of judges on their respective Circuit Court Benches.

The original bill was supported by the Macomb County Board of Commissioners, 23-3, and by the County Judges, 11-4. And although the State House passed it overwhelmingly by a 97-4 vote, the opposition of Senator Alan Sanborn (R-Richmond) nearly killed it for both counties.

Rather than see the bill die, I offered a compromise. Oakland got exactly what they requested, but I agreed to cut only one Macomb Judge instead of two. I did extend the period before the seat would be filled again from 2 years to 6 years.

So instead of Macomb delaying 2 judges for 2 years, we will delay filling 1 judgeship for 6 years. We will save \$3 million over 6 years, instead of \$2 million over 2 years. There is a time value to money, so don't get too excited. But the legislation does shrink government and save money.

Macomb and Oakland are struggling to balance their budgets. They approached legislators about not filling Circuit Court judicial vacancies when a judge turns 70 and can no longer run for re-election.

Each judge costs the state about \$140,000 in wages, but more importantly, they cost the County about \$573,000 a year in support costs when you add in the Secretary, Court Clerk, Court Recorder, Court Officer, and Prosecutor.

Oakland wanted to delay filling one of its vacancies for 4 years, and Macomb requested permission to delay filling 2 vacancies for 2 years each.

I thought the request made sense, and fought hard for passage for over 6 months. We had strong political support from the Oakland Bench, Commission and Executive L. Brooks Patterson. We had strong editorial support from *The Macomb Daily*, which called it “refreshing,” and the *Detroit Free Press*, which praised its “innovative thinking.” It had the support of watchdog groups like Taxpayers United Michigan, whose Chairman, Bill McMaster, championed its cause. Other organizations like the Michigan Association of Counties, Michigan Judges Association, and the State Court Administrator’s Office lent their endorsement.

Despite all this support, the bill was blocked in the Senate by Sen. Sanborn. I believe we had an honest disagreement. He argued that the reductions would not save money and would increase caseloads. His opposition could not stop the Oakland bill from passing the Senate, but he was able to kill the Macomb portion. His Republican colleagues were willing to give him the benefit of the doubt regarding conditions in Macomb. They took his word that the bill would not save money, despite a detailed estimate provided by Macomb County Finance Director Dave Diegel, which matched Oakland’s estimate. And they believed his assertion that the cuts would create a backlog, despite a similar backlog in Oakland County and the recommendation of both SCAO and Judge Ken Sanborn, the Chief Judge of Probate, that one judge could handle the Probate Court and a 2nd judge could be reassigned to Circuit to lower caseloads.

I believe the key to passage was the willingness of Macomb’s advocates to compromise and offer to cut only one judge instead of two. While this did not convince Senator Sanborn to vote for the bill, I believe it caused the rest of his colleagues to evaluate the bill on its own merits, instead of deferring to his judgment. Since we were willing to compromise, we appeared to be reasonable. Contrary to popular opinion, legislators don’t like to fight. If they feel that one side is being intransigent, and is not negotiating in good faith, they will reward the compromising party with their vote.

In the end, the compromise passed the Senate 31-1, with Senator Sanborn being the only Senator in opposition to the bill. The House ratified the agreement 95-7 minutes later.

I am disappointed we were not able to cut two judges, because I think our proposal was logical, our budget situation is grave, and that is what both Macomb’s Judges and Commission were asking for. I am sorry I could not deliver the full savings.

But it was the best we could do. And in the legislature, half a loaf is better than none.

Mickey’s Ends and Notes

WEBSITE GIVES PARENTS INFORMATION ON TOXIC TOYS

The nonprofit Ecology Center in Ann Arbor has released its third annual Consumer Guide to Toxic Chemicals in Toys. The guide can be found at www.healthystuff.org and is compiled from the testing of approximately 700 popular toys during the past year. Toys were tested for harmful levels of lead, cadmium, arsenic, mercury and other chemicals. The group hopes that this guide will help parents as they shop for toys for their children this holiday season.

MDCH WARNS RESIDENTS TO AVOID E-MAIL SCAM ON H1N1 VACCINE

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Office of the Chief Information Security Officer (OCISO) Cyber Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT) have received reports of fraudulent e-mails referencing a CDC-sponsored State Vaccination Program for the H1N1 virus. The messages request that users create a personal H1N1 "Vaccination Profile" on the cdc.gov Web site. The messages then states that anyone who has reached the age of 18 has to have his/her personal "Vaccination Profile" on the cdc.gov site.

Readers should note that the CDC has NOT implemented a state vaccination program requiring registration on www.cdc.gov and e-mails claiming this are a scam. Residents are asked to ignore and delete such e-mails.

Users that click on the embedded link in the e-mail are at risk of having a malicious code installed on their computer system. Internet users are encouraged to take the following steps to reduce the risk of being a victim of a phishing attack:

- Do not follow unsolicited links and do not open or respond to unsolicited email messages.
- Use caution when visiting untrusted Web sites.
- Use caution when entering personal information online.

For more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/hoaxes_rumors.html.

BEWARE OF FURNACE CLEANING SCAMS WHILE WINTERIZING YOUR HOME HEATING SYSTEM

This is the time of year to get your furnace cleaned and ready for winter. The Michigan Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth (DELEG) offers some sensible tips so that you do not fall victim to potential scams. In the past, the DELEG Bureau of Construction Codes has been involved in cases where elderly residents have been scammed out of as much as \$30,000 in unnecessary heating and cooling repairs and equipment purchases. These situations can be avoided by knowing how to recognize questionable and potentially fraudulent contractors. The do's and don'ts are:

*Do maintain your furnace by cleaning air returns with a household vacuum cleaner and checking the filter once a month and replacing it if necessary. This will maintain efficiency and prolong the life of the furnace.

*Do get your heating system thoroughly cleaned by a reputable, licensed, local mechanical contractor a minimum of every two years.

*Do get at least three independent written estimates from licensed local mechanical contractors if a furnace repair or replacement is recommended. If you subsequently sign a contract for work, make sure it stipulates that final payment is not due until the mandatory inspection by the mechanical code enforcing agency is approved.

*Do ask to see the mechanical contractor's license and write down the contractor and license number listed on it.

*Do verify that the license is valid and issued for the proper classifications for the work he or she will be conducting for you. You can check this information by visiting the Bureau's website at <http://www.michigan.gov/bcclicense> or by calling the Bureau's Mechanical Division at (517) 241-9325.

*Don't fall for telephone solicitations that offer "low-cost" or "free" furnace cleaning. Once in the dwelling, the worker may tell the homeowners their heating system has serious problems that require immediate attention. Get a written description of the suggested work and seek a second opinion.

*Don't sign a contract just because the worker says you face possible illness or death if the furnace isn't replaced immediately. If told your furnace threatens your health, ask for a written copy of the technician's test results and call your local utility company.

*Don't hire someone who comes to your door with a Shop-Vac vacuum offering to clean your heating ducts. It will not do the job. A proper cleaning requires a high volume vacuum system and maybe even a steam process.

DTE ENERGY AND CONSUMERS ENERGY OFFER UTILITY BILL ASSISTANCE

Now that winter is here, it's important that we begin preparing ourselves and our houses for the colder weather. DTE Energy and Consumers Energy offer a number of programs to help customers with their energy bills.

Payment assistance programs offered to customers include: a medical emergencies program to postpone shutoffs in the event of a medical issue, and a shut-off protection plan to spread future bills out over the year and to include equal monthly payments on an unpaid balance in order to avoid a shut-off.

Some consumers and all senior citizens regardless of their income also qualify for DTE Energy's Winter Protection Plan. This program protects seniors and low-income customers from shutoffs between November 1 and March 31. During this period, customers must pay a portion of their estimated annual bill plus regular payments on any past-due bills. After March 31, the required bill payments will increase to cover winter bills. For more information on any of these programs, please call Consumers Energy at 800-477-5050 and DTE Energy at 800-477-4747.

Many assistance programs are available by calling 211 at United Way. Weatherization help is available for low-income residents. These programs help with caulking, weather stripping, and insulation. Another program that is available is THAW, the Heat and Warmth Fund, which helps people who are facing a shut-off and have exhausted all federal and state funding programs.

The state offers assistance with energy bills through the State Emergency Relief Program in the Department of Human Services. This program is available to DHS clients and non-DHS clients. For more information, call the Energy Assistance Hotline at 800-292-5650, or visit your local DHS office.

In addition, visit the following websites to learn more about help that is available:

DTE Energy:

<http://www.dteenergy.com/residentialCustomers/billingPayment/paymentPrograms/payAssistance.html>

Consumers Energy: <http://www.consumersenergy.com/welcome.htm>

United Way of Southeastern Michigan: www.uwsem.org/

THAW, the Heat and Warmth Fund: http://www.thawfund.org/how_help/index.html

State Emergency Relief Energy Assistance Programs:

<http://www.michigan.gov/heatingassistance/0,1607,7-215-33211-105989--,00.html>

Office Hours

*I am currently working on scheduling office hours for the upcoming year. Please stay tuned for updates on next year's office hour schedule.

Future Office Hours T.B.A.	
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Mickey's TV Insider Show

Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

Sterling Heights

Every Saturday and Sunday at 1 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Utica

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Clinton Township

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Roseville

Various Times-check local listings
(Comcast Channel 18/WOW Channel 10)

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